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Wednesday, 21 January 2009, 3 p.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Ripert	(France)
Members:	Austria	Mr. Mayr-Harting
	Burkina Faso	Mr. Kafando
	China	Mr. Zhang Yesui
	Costa Rica	Mr. Urbina
	Croatia	Mr. Vilović
	Japan	Mr. Takasu
	Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	Mr. Ettalhi
	Mexico	Mr. Heller
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Turkey	Mr. İlkin
	Uganda	Mr. Butagira
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir John Sawers
	United States of America	Mr. Wolff
	Viet Nam	Mr. Bui The Giang

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Expression of farewell to Mr. Giadalla Ettalhi, Permanent Representative of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya to the United Nations

The President (*spoke in French*): As this is the last time that Ambassador Giadalla Ettalhi will participate in the work of the Security Council in his capacity as the Permanent Representative of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya to the United Nations, I should like, on behalf of all the members of the Council, to take this opportunity to express our gratitude to him as both a colleague and a friend.

In addition to his functions as the Permanent Representative of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya to the United Nations, Ambassador Ettalhi has devoted many years to the service of his country, including as Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Planning. He has made a significant contribution to the work of the Council. As a man of conviction, he has remained faithful to the positions of his country and of his regional group, all the while demonstrating the understanding and spirit of dialogue necessary to facilitating the compromises that enable the Security Council to express itself unanimously on the most sensitive of issues. Lastly, during Libya's presidency, Ambassador Ettalhi led the Council's debates on numerous important issues with great wisdom and remarkable equanimity. As we bid a warm farewell to Ambassador Ettalhi, I join other members of the Council in wishing him every success in his future endeavours, both professionally and in his private life.

Mr. Ettalhi (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for your kind words. Allow me to say a few words of thanks to you and to all the colleagues with whom I have worked in the Security Council for your unreserved cooperation, the good offices you have always performed and your unwavering and sincere efforts to achieve consensus. I also have the pleasure of thanking the members of the Secretariat for the outstanding work they continue to do.

I have learned a great many things despite the relatively short time that I spent in the Security Council as the Permanent Representative of my country. I have learned much in working alongside my colleagues, whom I consider to be very dear friends. The lofty ideals with which they carry out their work and engage in dialogue have made an unforgettable impression on me. I will always be most proud of the days I spent with my colleagues in the Security Council. Although I may not be fully satisfied with my work in the Security Council as an institution, I am indeed exceedingly pleased with my personal experience working with all my colleagues here.

Our world today faces enormous and real challenges and threats that all of us have to confront. Whether we are weak or strong, poor or rich or large or small countries, all of us must face those dangers, and we can overcome them only by working together. That is the spirit that has inspired me.

Moreover, we must be aware that in today's world our destiny is a shared one. We are all aboard the same ship; we have no choice but to work together to right errors, to act in the framework of international legitimacy and to strive for a world of peace and prosperity. I think that the United Nations and, in particular, the Security Council bear a special responsibility and have a decisive role to play in addressing those challenges and those dangers.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in French*): The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Security Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear a briefing by the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon. I would like to thank you, Mr. Secretary-General, especially as you have come here to meet with the Security Council when you have just returned from a lengthy and difficult trip, which I am sure has had its effects on you. I thank you very much for your gesture towards the Council. I give you the floor.

The Secretary-General: I hope that members of the Council will forgive me for not being able to deliver this briefing myself. I have lost my voice, or most of it. In any case, Mr. Pascoe was with me every step of the way. I know that members will not want to hear my unpleasant-sounding voice, so Mr. Pascoe will share with the Council what I would have said if I could. I look forward to speaking with the Council again as soon as possible.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the Secretary-General for his statement, and I give the floor now to Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

Mr. Pascoe: I should just say first that the Secretary-General's voice was very strong up until the end, but in Gaza City, he was trying to project to at least 500 employees at the back of the room and then gave a press conference where the smoke from things that were still smouldering was pretty bad. I think that between the two of them, they did him in in the end.

I will, with the Council's indulgence, read out the following statement of the Secretary-General.

> "I was pleased to brief and consult with the Council eight days ago, before embarking on a trip to the Middle East that was intended to send a simple and unmistakable message about the crisis in Gaza and southern Israel: the fighting must stop; resolution 1860 (2009) must be fully respected and implemented. I deeply appreciated the Council's support for my mission, which was also reiterated by the General Assembly in its resolution ES-10/18 last Friday. I believe it significantly strengthened my efforts to stop the violence.
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> "In the days since, I visited and met with the leaders of Egypt, Jordan, Israel, the occupied Palestinian territory, Turkey, Lebanon and Syria. I took part in a meeting convened by President Mubarak in Sharm el-Sheikh and the Arab economic summit in Kuwait. I also spoke on the telephone on many occasions with several of the leaders and of course met with all of the leaders at the two meetings to discuss the situation in Gaza. I visited Gaza City and Sderot yesterday to show my solidarity with civilians and underscore the urgent and important tasks ahead. Throughout the mission, I have been seeking to maximize coordination in the diplomatic efforts to end the crisis and to make clear the expectations of the United Nations as embodied in resolution 1860 (2009).
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> "I commend the leadership and initiative taken by Egyptian President Mubarak to help achieve a ceasefire. I also pay tribute to the many, many leaders from around the world who have made significant contributions to this effort.
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> "The fighting has ended with declarations of unilateral ceasefires and, today, the withdrawal of Israeli troops. This is an important achievement and offers a much-needed respite for the suffering civilians, especially in the Gaza Strip. But conditions are still fragile, and much more remains to be done on both the humanitarian and diplomatic fronts.
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> "In this regard, I look to Egypt and others to continue vital efforts to seek understandings and mechanisms to ensure that a durable and sustainable ceasefire is quickly put in place. And I look to regional and international leaders, including members of the League of Arab States, the Quartet and the Security Council, to come together to contribute to and help sustain these guarantees and arrangements, as called for by resolution 1860 (2009). The unilateral ceasefires must be translated into a lasting arrangement that prevents illicit trafficking in arms and ammunition and ensures the sustained reopening of the Gaza crossings on the basis of the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access between the Palestinian Authority and Israel. This is the framework outlined in resolution 1860 (2009), and it will help stabilize the situation on the ground.
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> "For many in Gaza, this also remains an hour of despair, grief and desperate need. They were caught throughout this crisis between Hamas's unacceptable and irresponsible actions and Israel's blockade and use of excessive and disproportionate military force.
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> "During my visit yesterday, I saw part of the destruction and suffering caused to this small and densely populated area by more than three weeks of heavy bombardment, shelling and street fighting. This, of course, follows on top of months and years of occupation, conflict and economic deprivation. I was deeply affected by what I saw.
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> "I went to Gaza to show my respect and concern for the deaths and injuries of so many people, and the thousands of people who lost their family and friends. I wanted to send the signal that the United Nations stands with the people who have borne this tragedy and disaster, and that we will not abandon them.
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> "And I visited Sderot, to meet with the civilians of southern Israel who have been exposed to indiscriminate rocket and mortar fire for too long.

"In both places, I underscored the urgent need for international humanitarian law to be fully respected and for civilians to be protected. As I made clear, where civilians have been killed and there are allegations of violations of international humanitarian law, there should be thorough investigations, full explanations and, where it is required, accountability.

"In Gaza, I met with the United Nations staff on the ground, who worked bravely, courageously and heroically during these past weeks. They have made the United Nations proud and humbled us by their example. I cannot praise and thank them enough, and I pay tribute to the United Nations staff members and contractors who have been killed or injured.

"I also assured the people of Gaza that the United Nations will work urgently and diligently to provide urgent humanitarian assistance and to start a daunting and challenging process of recovery and reconstruction.

"Tomorrow, Special Coordinator Robert Serry and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs John Holmes will visit Gaza to begin an urgent needs assessment focusing on immediate humanitarian priorities across the board. These include medical care, food, shelter, rubble removal, unexploded ordnance and possibly mines, electricity, cash, water and sanitation.

"Mr. Holmes and the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), Karen AbuZayd, will report to the Council directly on the humanitarian situation next week. The United Nations intends to launch a flash humanitarian appeal within 10 days of that first mission. The United Nations is also working to support the development of assessments and plans for early recovery and the rehabilitation of critical services, even as it supports ongoing emergency repairs. It will coordinate closely in this regard with Prime Minister Fayyad. There are plans for a comprehensive report to be presented at a conference in Cairo and feed into the work of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee thereafter. It will be crucial for major donor countries to take part and contribute generously in the humanitarian and early recovery efforts ahead.

"Indeed, I wish to emphasize that as we begin to meet the challenge of humanitarian relief, early recovery and reconstruction, we need to work together in close coordination and consultation. In addition to the parties themselves, the United Nations is already in close contact with key partners: Egypt and other Arab countries; the European Commission and the World Bank; Norway as the Chair of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee; Turkey; and the Quartet members — Europe, Russia and United States. In that regard, I will continue to urge the new President of the United States and his team to make peace in the Middle East one of their top priorities.

"I would like to note here that immediate and increased access to Gaza is key to any humanitarian effort, let alone reconstruction. In my meetings with Israeli leaders, I insisted on the importance of increased access to the Gaza Strip. I asked President Mubarak to ensure that Rafah is open for humanitarian material.

"The Council is well aware of the several incidents of outrageous attacks against United Nations facilities and heard a briefing here last Thursday on the attacks that saw UNRWA main warehouse burn down, with much urgently required assistance lost. This attack took place on the day I arrived in Israel, and I saw for myself yesterday the still-smoldering ruins of our facilities. From the outset, I have protested the attacks against United Nations facilities in the strongest possible terms and have called on all combatants to respect the sanctity of United Nations premises. I must inform the Security Council that when I was in Israel I was given personal assurances by the Israeli authorities that such attacks would not happen again. Despite that, a mere two days later there was an attack against a United Nations school that served as a refuge and shelter to those who had nowhere else to hide, and two little boys were killed.

"When I met the Israeli leadership on several occasions, I demanded a thorough investigation by Israel into every one of these incidents. I expect to receive a full explanation of each incident and that those responsible will be held accountable for their actions. Prime Minister Olmert promised to provide me with the results of their inquiry on an urgent basis. I will then decide on appropriate follow-up action.

"The challenges ahead are immense and numerous. While our immediate priority now may be humanitarian relief and early recovery, we must also continue our work to ensure sustainable arrangements underpinning a durable ceasefire and our longer-term effort to achieve peace.

"As part of this effort, I have discussed the political way forward at length with regional and international leaders. It is clear to me that, for any sustainable political progress to occur and for Gaza to properly recover and rebuild, Palestinians must face the challenge of reconciliation. In both Gaza and Ramallah, I made a passionate appeal for Palestinians to overcome divisions and work to restore one Palestinian Government within the framework of the legitimate Palestinian Authority. I repeat that appeal here today. I have stated clearly that the United Nations will work with a united Palestinian Government encompassing Gaza and the West Bank. In Kuwait, I appealed to the Arab world to unite in support of this endeavour, and I have taken note of the efforts of King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia in this regard. I also appeal to the international community as a whole to do the same.

"I also visited Lebanon, where I met with President Sleiman, Prime Minister Siniora and Speaker Berri. I had the honour to address the Lebanese Parliament. Before my arrival, I was very aware of the risk that Lebanon might enter into a new conflict with Israel as a result of the situation in Gaza. However, I was encouraged by the condemnation by the Government of Lebanon of the incidents of rockets being fired from southern Lebanon into Israel and by the prompt action taken by the Lebanese Armed Forces and the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL).

"In Israel, I asked the political and defence leadership to exercise restraint and to take steps to implement outstanding elements of resolution 1701 (2006), especially the withdrawal from Ghajar. I visited UNIFIL in the South, and would like to once again congratulate the Force for the important role it is playing to stabilize the area and implement resolution 1701 (2006), together with the Lebanese Armed Forces. I also discussed Lebanon at some length in Syria with President Assad.

"Let me be clear. Yes, the recent crisis in Gaza and southern Israel requires conflict management and containment, but it is also a symptom of broader problems and deeper conflicts demanding conflict resolution. If the past weeks of violence are not followed quickly by broad political action, we face the real risk of greater polarization and frustration in the region, not to mention a possible repeat of what we have seen.

"A true end to violence and lasting security for both Palestinians and Israelis will only come through a just and comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. This effort must have at its centre the implementation of Security Council resolutions and the framework of the Arab Peace Initiative. We do not need new plans and processes. We have the tools we need. We need only political will and action. Peace has eluded us for far too long.

"The violence, destruction and suffering before us have been a mark of collective political failure. We made a genuine effort last year but did not succeed. We must do more now. Nothing short of a massive international effort is now required to support and insist on a resolution of this conflict. The peoples of the region, and indeed the international community, can afford no less.

"As Secretary-General of the United Nations, I will continue to uphold the need for an end of the occupation that began in 1967, the creation of a Palestinian State to coexist in peace and security alongside Israel, and a just, lasting and comprehensive peace between Israel and all its Arab neighbours. I am more determined than ever to see this achieved."

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the Under-Secretary-General. There are no other speakers on my list.

In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 3.40 p.m.